

GRAND JURY INSPECTION OF THE CALIFORNIA MEN'S COLONY

The San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury's duties include mandatory inspection of all prisons in the County. Eight members of the Jury visited the California Men's Colony located north of San Luis Obispo on Highway One. The Jury visit included the East Facility on September 20th and the West Facility on September 23, 2005.

AUTHORITY

California Penal Code §919(b) states: "The grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the count." The Attorney General's opinion (62 Op. Attorney General Cal. 268, Number 79-313) defines a prison "as a place maintained by a public authority for the detention of those confined under legal process to insure their appearance for further proceedings, or for the confinement of those convicted of criminal offenses and sentence therefore".

METHOD

The purpose of the visits was to fulfill the jury's mandate and receive information regarding programs at the prison. The jury members spent one and a half days touring the East and West Facilities meeting with the administrative staffs of both units and learning about the programs offered.

NARRATIVE

THE EAST FACILITY - Approximately 3800 inmates are housed in four three-story buildings referred to as "quads." Other buildings include a psychiatric service facility, a medical/dental hospital and a building for educational services. The prison also has a large chapel with services for Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Native American and Muslim religions. Many other groups also use the chapel. The jury viewed the knitting and finishing mill, fabric production, shoe factory and printing plant. Approximately 900 inmates work in these factories during the day. The vocational and educational classrooms were visited while in session and appeared to be well equipped with computers and other aids. There were 236 inmates on a waiting list to enter classes because there is a shortage of instructors and building space for these programs. All

inmates are tested for grade level achievement when first entering the prison; many function at fourth grade skill levels. Food services in the prison employ many of the inmates. Meals for all quads are prepared in a central kitchen.

THE EAST FACILITY'S PSYCHIATRIC AND MENTAL HEALTH UNITS - The East Facility of CMC includes a psychiatric treatment and evaluation unit. The inmates housed at this unit are determined by the Department of Corrections to be in need of treatment due to their behavior or by psychiatric diagnoses. There is a new Mental Health building, built with the help of inmate labor, where the psychiatrists, psychologists, and other mental health therapists treat inmates. All of the inmates in this unit are on medications because of their mental health needs. In addition to individual and group therapy, psychological testing and crisis intervention therapies are provided. During the time of the visit to CMC psychiatric unit, many of the inmates were outside participating in various activities.

THE WEST FACILITY - The West Facility of CMC is located on 138 acres; it lies on a hill adjacent to the East Facility complex. The prison is comprised of 32 dorms arranged in four units. The buildings are World War II wooden army barracks with 50 double-decker bunks to a dorm. The dorms were designed to hold about 1400 inmates, but were filled with nearly 2900 prisoners at the time of the visit. Each unit housed some 90 inmates with double bunks spaced three feet apart. There were no scheduled hours for sleeping. Each bunk has individual lockers. Every dorm has a television room with programs controlled by the institution. The units appeared clean despite laundry drying inside the buildings. There is a grassy area around each building for exercising. The inmates are locked in at night with guards posted at both ends of the units.

MEETING WITH STAFF OF BOTH EAST AND WEST FACILITIES: The Grand Jury met with staff members of both East and West facilities to address the following issues:

- **EVACUATION PLANS:** Written emergency plans are in place, and includes putting the prison in "lockdown" mode and securing the perimeter fence.

- **STAFFING:** A number of long time correctional officers are nearing retirement and replacements are difficult to recruit. This shortage has caused some retirees to be called to come back to work, covering shifts not staffed by regular officers. Due to State regulations, newly graduated nurse cannot be hired unless they have had a year of professional work experience. This has made it difficult to fill vacancies.
- **EARTHQUAKE PREPAREDNESS:** Many parts of the facility are now being retrofitted to meet earthquake safety standards.
- **HANDLING OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION:** Approximately 320 undocumented immigrants are being housed in the prison awaiting transport by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Some are housed as long as three weeks before transport. This has put an additional burden on the CMC staff and facilities.
- **FEEDING INMATES:** The budget calls for an expenditure of \$2.51 a day to feed each inmate. A request for an increased budget for the prison has been turned down by the California State Legislature.
- **CONDITION OF WEST FACILITY BUILDINGS –** There have been plans in place for many years to raze the current World War II buildings. Plans have been approved, but due to the state budget constraints in the past few years, the plans were put aside. A great deal of work and expense must be directed in maintaining these 50-year old structures.
- **STAFFING THE WEST FACILITY –** The West Facility is having the same problems as the East Facility with regard to staffing.

CONCLUSIONS

As the California Men's Colony is a state-run institution, the County Grand Jury cannot require responses from the State of California, however, it is mandated that the Jury point out existing needs and bring these needs to the attention of the general public, CMC, and the State

Legislators. Staffing shortages of both Correction Officers and Nursing staff in both East and West facilities need to be addressed.

CHANGES SINCE THE GRAND JURY'S VISIT - Since the time of the Grand Jury visit (2005), some changes have occurred. In the case of the shortage of nurses, the State has authorized an 18% salary increase. This has helped in recruitment, but has not solved the problem of hiring newly graduated nurses. The Correction Officer Training Academy has been reactivated and a second academy has been added to train needed personnel. The Grand Jury was impressed by the professional staff of both East and West Facilities of CMC. The staff should be commended for handling a difficult job.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: Staff and buildings of the CMC Education Department are inadequate to meet the needs of the inmate population.

Finding 2: The West Facility Buildings are overcrowded. The cost of maintaining the World War II buildings is costly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Closed circuit television and distance learning should be incorporated into the educational process. Although this would not take the place of new staff and buildings, it would be a more efficient use of existing space. With the augmentation of classroom technology, those inmates on the waiting list could be accommodated. (Finding 1)

Recommendation 2: As a result of the Grand Jury's interviews with CMC Superintendents, the Jury was informed that the State has plans to renovate and expand the West Facility. The Grand Jury encourages the implementation of these plans. (Finding 2)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

- **The California Men's Colony: Due 08/30/06 (All Findings and Recommendations)**
- **The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation: Due 09/30/06 (All Findings and Recommendations)**